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Chairman Smith, Representative Payne, Committee Members, I want to commend you for holding this hearing to review how U.S. leadership is protecting refugees around the world and to consider ways to expand those protections. I am Ken Bacon, the president of Refugees International, an independent advocacy group.

The number of refugees and asylum seekers declined to 11.5 million last year from a recent high of 14.9 million at the end of 2001. The reason for the decline is that refugees go home when wars end. The U.S. is playing a key role in helping to create conditions for refugee return around the world. Over three million Afghans returned home after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, and hundreds of thousands of refugees have returned to Angola, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

Pressure from President Bush helped lead to the resignation of Charles Taylor as president of Liberia after he was indicted for crimes associated with his brutal rule, paving the way for significant repatriation there. The U.S. role in promoting the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between north and south Sudan and the more recent participation in talks that led to a partial, but fragile, peace agreement for Darfur are also important achievements. But there is more we can do.

Unfortunately, the population of displaced people extends beyond refugees. While there are 11.5 million refugees—people who have crossed an international border to escape persecution—there are currently some 21.3 million internally displaced people, according to comprehensive figures compiled by the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants. Internally displaced people live in refugee-like conditions but have not crossed national borders. For example, about 200,000 refugees have fled to Chad to avoid the genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan, while nearly two million people are internally displaced in Darfur. There are large internally displaced populations in Sudan, Columbia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, northern Uganda and Iraq. But internally displaced people also go home when wars end, as they have in Angola and are today in southern Sudan.

There are three things that the U.S. must do to help win further reductions in the number of displaced people:

1. Continue to intervene strategically to promote peace, as we have done in Sudan. U.S. leadership is also playing a role in reducing a large displaced population in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and could play a larger role in northern Uganda.
2. Provide adequate support to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. UNHCR is playing a major role in orchestrating returns in southern Sudan and is about to take on a lead role in protecting large populations of internally displaced people in northern Uganda and the DRC, yet the U.S. contribution to UNHCR is declining.
3. Meet our obligations for funding UN peacekeeping operations. As a recent study by the Government Accountability Office explained, investments in UN peacekeeping operations make sense for the U.S. The U.S. provides 25% of the funds for UN peacekeeping operations, yet we are currently \$521 million behind on our commitment to support UN peacekeeping operations.

A look at major displacement crises in Sudan, northern Uganda and the DRC illustrates the results and opportunities for U.S. leadership.

Sudan

Last year U.S. diplomacy helped produce an agreement that ended a 21 civil war between the government of Sudan and rebels in the South. Large numbers of the four million internally displaced and 500,000 refugees are beginning to return. A UN peacekeeping operation is slowly moving into place, and the UNHCR is supporting the returns.

In the Darfur region of west Sudan, fighting has recently gotten worse. Last week's intervention by Deputy Secretary of State Zoellick helped produce a peace agreement between the government of Sudan and one of three rebel factions. Yesterday, Secretary of State Rice told the UN Security Council that "the Darfur Peace Agreement is the foundation on which to begin building a future of freedom, security and opportunity for the people of Darfur." But she noted that the agreement can't succeed without UN peacekeepers to supplement a small African Union force in Darfur. "It is now more important than ever to have a strong United Nations effort to ensure that the agreement's detailed timelines are monitored and enforced. The accord clearly states that neutral peacekeepers have an essential role to play in this process," she told the Security Council.

The stakes are high, not just for the people of Sudan but for the entire region. Instability and violence in Darfur has already spread to Chad, and for years Sudan has supported and sheltered the Lord's Resistance Army, a vicious rebel group that has terrorized northern Uganda. The LRA is also launching attacks in southern Sudan, where UN peacekeepers need to do more to protect returnees as well as humanitarian workers.

Northern Uganda

In northern Uganda, a 20 year war has displaced up to two million people who live in fear of the Lord's Resistance Army. This war has had a particularly devastating impact on children—more than 25,000 have been abducted by the LRA and turned into fighters or sex slaves. U.S. leadership is essential for ending this nightmare endured by the people of northern Uganda.

The more than 200 camps in northern Uganda for displaced people are horrific. People do not have access to adequate health care, water, sanitation, education, or protection, and as a result almost 1,000 people are dying a week. The UNHCR has just been assigned responsibility for protecting the internally displaced people of northern Uganda, but the agency will need more funds to carry out its job.

The war in northern Uganda has spilled over into southern Sudan and eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Regional peace and security are at risk. This war now threatens to undermine the fragile peace in Southern Sudan and destabilize the entire region. There are disturbing charges that members of the Sudanese government continue to support the LRA.

The U.S., one of Uganda's larger donors and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, has a critical role to play in protecting Ugandan citizens from further violence and in bringing about a political solution to this crisis. The U.S. should press the Government of Uganda, which has failed to protect and assist its citizens, to provide humanitarian services, protection, and reconciliation.

In addition, the U.S. should:

1. Support the strengthening of the UN peacekeeping missions in the Sudan and the DRC to ensure that they have the resources and the mandate to protect civilians from the LRA, disarm LRA fighters and capture indicted commanders. Eighty percent of LRA fighters are abducted children, so the strategy against the LRA must focus on protecting them. The U.S. must also make it clear to the government of Sudan that relations between Washington and Khartoum can't improve until Sudan expels the LRA.

2. Appoint a senior advisor to coordinate a peace process and request the UN Secretary General to appoint a high-level UN Regional envoy who can facilitate political initiatives to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

3. Support the appointment of a UN Panel of Experts to investigate the sources of support, including Sudan, for the LRA.

4. Allocate the necessary resources to increase support to displaced persons, including reintegration and reconciliation programs that emphasize community-based initiatives.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

After nearly a decade of violence that has led to some four million war-related deaths in the DRC, conditions are improving. The country is preparing hold its first democratic elections in 45 years. Some of the 380,000 Congolese who have sought refuge in neighboring countries are beginning to return, and about half of the 3.5 million internally displaced people in the DRC have returned home. U.S. leadership has created a useful political dialogue to address political, security and humanitarian challenges on a regional basis. The promising transformation won't succeed unless the U.S. remains involved.

Expected increasing returns of refugees and internally displaced people will put significant pressure on existing, but fragile, community structures, possibly leading to tensions and conflicts. Working with other donors, the U.S. must ensure that funds are readily available to fill the gaps in community-level reintegration assistance. Adequate support of UNHCR, which has a new mandate to protect internally displaced people, and the World Food Program are particularly important.

The Congolese state and its national army are currently too weak to guarantee security. MONUC, the UN's largest peacekeeping operation, is the only force capable of imposing a measure of control on the chaotic military system in the Congo. MONUC presence and patrolling have helped create a more secure environment for humanitarian operations and allowed increased access to groups in need. The US must continue to support MONUC at current troop levels for at least one year beyond the end of its current mandate on September 30, 2006.

I want to touch briefly on four other displacement issues where American leadership is important—statelessness, Burma, the Montagnards from Vietnam and treatment of North Korean refugees.

Statelessness

Last year Refugees International published *Lives on Hold: The Human Costs of Statelessness* to highlight the plight of an estimated 11 million stateless people. "Everyone has the right to a nationality," states the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, yet Algeria, Bangladesh, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, Syria, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates, and many more countries contain populations of people who aren't citizens of any country. As a result, they lack passports necessary for travel. Often they can't work legally, receive health and other benefits, or send their children to school.

There are steps the U.S. can take to help generate protections for people who lack citizenship.

- First, I urge this committee to hold a dedicated hearing on stateless persons. International attention and pressure is the key to winning citizenship for stateless populations.

- Second, provide new funding at the necessary level to support UNHCR work on behalf of stateless people (currently there are only two full time staff members to aid 11 million stateless in over 75 countries).
- Third, designate at least one full-time point person at State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration and at the Department of Human Rights and Labor to address statelessness. To her credit, Assistant Secretary of State Sauerbrey is taking an interest in this human rights issue.

Burma

Burma's brutal policies of religions and ethnic repression continue to generate a steady flow of refugees. We estimate that more than one million Burmese have fled to surrounding countries—Bangladesh, India, Thailand and Malaysia. The U.S. has little leverage over Burma, but it is in a position to resettle groups of Burmese who can't return home. However, the new security provisions of the USA Patriot Act and the Real ID Act have erected barriers to resettlement for refugees who may have been forced to support rebel groups, even those fighting a government in Burma that the U.S. opposes. As other witnesses have said, blocking resettlement of Burmese Chin, who suffer persecution because they are Christians, or Karen, who face violence because of their ethnicity and sometimes because of their religion, deprives persecuted people of an important human rights protection.

The waiver for Karen at the Tham Hin refugee camp in Thailand is only a start and doesn't deal with the fundamental problem. In the meantime, refugee admissions are lagging and are likely to fall way below the goal set by President Bush.

Montagnards

Montagnards continue to leave Vietnam to escape persecution there. Some of the persecution is based on religion, and some of the persecution is based on their demand for economic and land rights, or on the Montagnard community's alliance with the U.S. during the Vietnam war. Last year, the UNHCR, Cambodia, and Vietnam signed an agreement providing for the screening and possible third country resettlement of Montagnards. Over the last few decades, the U.S. has resettled thousands of Montagnards, and we continue to do so.

In 2005 UNHCR cleared hundreds of Montagnards for resettlement, but it rejected about two dozen. The U.S. reviewed those cases and offered to resettle about 75% if those who had been denied refugee status by UNHCR. This year the U.S. is facing the same opportunity to review cases that UNHCR has rejected for resettlement. There are credible reports that some Montagnards who leave Vietnam and then return face persecution when they go home. Therefore, fairness, consistency and our commitment to protecting people from persecution argue that the U.S. should continue to review the cases of Montagnards rejected for resettlement by UNHCR.

North Korea

RI welcomes the possibility of U.S. resettlement options for North Korean refugees. But the country of first asylum, China, limits the work of organizations trying to assist these asylum seekers; prevents UNHCR from accessing asylum seekers; and prevents US officials from interviewing them. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has recently taken up this matter directly with the Chinese authorities, but he needs backing from major donor countries, such as the United States. Is the US engaging directly with the Chinese on this issue at senior levels? The public record is not clear. We encourage Congress to push this issue with the Administration.

I would be glad to answer questions these or other topics.

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